



Christmas Chronicle

Newsletter

December 2021/January 2022



**St Mary's-Greyfriars' Parish Church
Locum Minister: Rev Douglas Irving**

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www.stmarysgreyfriars.org.uk

Scottish charity no. SC009432

From the Locum Minister

A wild night, last night, the night of 26/27 November 2021, as the old Christian year draws to a close and gives way to the new, tomorrow, 28 November, Advent Sunday!

Early last evening, I drove Hilary over to Castle Douglas for her pre-Christmas night for midwives in the Yellow Team for the Stewartry. By the time I was due to collect her, 10pm, all roads out of Dalbeattie were blocked by fallen trees. A colleague and her husband from Dumfries drove her to Dumfries on the A75 and attempted to get her home, doubling back to Dalbeattie, on the A711 but it proved blocked as well. They only got Hilary back as far as just beyond the turn off for Kirkgunzeon. The A711 was blocked too! (See photos on next page.) Winter had come with a vengeance, a few days early! All this was confirmed by this morning's weather report on the BBC and on social media. Both reported widespread storm damage across Dumfries & Galloway, with roads out of Dumfries itself, to New Abbey and Thornhill, also closed. In the north of the country and on the east coast, and down south, snow falls were being reported. Freezing conditions are forecast for tomorrow, Advent Sunday.

I found myself this morning singing, as I washed the dishes, Christina Rossetti's words "In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan, earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone; snow had fallen snow on snow, snow on snow, in the bleak midwinter, long ago."

Just before Advent, travellers "from the east" making their way to Dalbeattie had been stymied in their travels! It caused me to ponder what hardship and perils wise men from the East faced in their long journeying to Bethlehem all those years ago, in the call of God, to afford humanity witness to **the** birth of all births? As with witnesses to Jesus Christ as the World's Saviour and Lord in every generation, including our own, God saw them through!



At morning light, the A711, closed by a fallen tree near Kirkgunzeon. Similar scene near Goldielea Care Home just outside Dumfries.

In his life's journey, Jesus, in His call of God, faced hardship and peril from earliest days. His life was threatened with early termination by the "Slaughter of the Innocents" carried out at Herod's command. Mary and Joseph fled their homeland to Egypt, taking Jesus out of exposure to Herod's evil intentions. Jesus became both a migrant and refugee as part of His total identification with the human condition. I often wondered how the holy family's temporary exile was financed. Did the gold presented by one of Wise Men from the East fund the temporary exile?

Huge poignancy surrounding Jesus' birth at Bethlehem. Jesus was under the shadow of the Cross as reflected upon in this image.



We can never separate crib from cross. Jesus was born to die. Throughout His life He set example for all His discipleship. Die to self! Live for God and for all He sends your way! God's Holy Spirit, found within, will assist you in this!

Jesus so lived in His dying and death on Calvary. Born in like manner to ourselves, He truly represented us before God. On humankind's behalf, for your human life and mine, Jesus plead for God's forgiveness of us, as he bled. This we believe and seek that others sent our way be so convinced as we celebrate Jesus' birth, as closing verses of the carol "See him lying in a bed of straw" assert:

"Angels, sing again the song you sang,
Sing the glory of God's gracious plan:
Sing that Bethl'em's little baby can
be the Saviour of us all.

Mine are riches, from your poverty,
From your innocence, eternity,
Mine, forgiveness by your death for me,
child of sorrow for my joy."

Joy be yours and with all sent your way, this Christmas time, and in the New Year of God's promise and giving!

Your Locum Minister and Friend,
Douglas Irving

Church Register

Deaths – "I am the resurrection and the life"

24/10/21 Mrs M Burns

7/11/21 Mrs I Mitchell

Please let me know of any changes of address: **Marion Bennett**, 2
Wolfgill Drive Dumfries DG1 4XY. Tel: 263106

From the Session Clerk

To Members of St Mary's Greyfriars' Church November 2021

On Sunday 31st Oct 2021, we celebrated the Sacrament of Holy Communion, followed by a congregational meeting led by our Interim Moderator Rev. Fiona Wilson, and myself. The purpose of the meeting was to make members aware of the difficult position of the Kirk Session.

Following the death of our minister, Rev. David Logan, in August 2019, Presbytery granted permission for us to call a new minister, and we, the congregation, agreed to support such a call. It soon became apparent that we would struggle to find enough people to form a Nominating Committee, who would compile a Parish profile - a congregational CV - designed to attract a prospective minister to this charge.

By January 2020 some of us were having doubts as to our ability to support a new minister, and one senior elder highlighted the following concerns to Session:

- Age and poor health of many elders, coupled with a lack of younger people willing to be ordained as elders. Could we for instance manage a door to door Stewardship campaign, or a Parish Development Programme?
- Falling church role, with many members too elderly and/or infirm to attend worship.
- Difficult access to church and lack of disabled access outside and within church.
- Old buildings needing expensive maintenance.
- Falling financial contributions.
- Little Mission or Outreach work.

- Apathy of a large part of this congregation who offer no financial or practical support.
- Lack of people to take on roles essential to the running of the church.

The Kirk Session held an extraordinary meeting on 22nd February 2020 purely to discuss these issues and look for a way forward. At the conclusion of the meeting it was agreed that we could not support a call for the above reasons, and Presbytery was notified of our decision.

In early March, we met with Caerlaverock Kirk Session to make them aware of this decision. Due to the subsequent lockdown, we were unable to progress.

In October 2020 every member was sent a letter regarding our sustainability, asking for their commitment to church life, enclosing a SAE and a Church of Scotland Assessment form to help people decide if/when they could return to church. Out of the 90 forms returned, there were 2 offers of help - a very disappointing result.

Our Options as outlined by Presbytery are as follows:

- Linkage. We are already linked with Caerlaverock.
- Union. We find a congregation willing to take us, our finance, and our buildings, for which we would be jointly responsible.
- Dissolution. The congregation would be dissolved, each member would receive a Certificate of Transference, and would be free to join a church of their choice. Our finance would go to the General Trustees in Edinburgh who would then have responsibility for upkeep/sale of our buildings.

I am sorry to have to tell you that the Kirk Session voted overwhelmingly for Dissolution.

Of course, this is only a recommendation, and you as a congregation will have the opportunity to vote on the future of your church.

As you will appreciate, this has been a very painful exercise for us all, and I can only commend your elders for the responsible lead they have shown, in facing up to the realities of our situation. There is currently major restructuring going on in the Church of Scotland, making it leaner and more fit for purpose. The number of ministers in our Presbytery will reduce to 12.1, so some difficult changes are on the way. Our Presbytery will amalgamate with others to form SouthWest Presbytery, reaching from Ayr and Ardrossan, Dumfries and Kirkcudbright, Wigtown and Stranraer, down to Annan and Eskdale. This will be one of only 12 Presbyteries starting from September 2022.

We will be guided by Presbytery, and I will keep you informed of any developments as they arise.

Meantime, we thank Rev. Douglas Irving for his ongoing pastoral care, as we continue to meet in fellowship to worship, love and serve the Lord, as He has commanded us to do.

Every blessing
Anne Mackie
Session Clerk

Congratulations!

Congratulations to Mr J Robson who celebrated his 90th birthday recently.

Church services

Our Christmas service will be held on Sunday 19th December.

Remembrance Sunday

At our service on Sunday 14th November David Cannon laid a poppy wreath at the war memorial in the church vestibule. He is pictured below with Rev Douglas Irving.



Guild Report

It was with great sadness that we heard of the sudden death of one of our members, Irma Mitchell, on November 7.

Our last two meetings were well attended and members were very interested to hear about the D&G archive service in October and the Guild project helping people with eating disorders in November.

The December meeting on 21st will be one of fun and games to celebrate Christmas and we start 2022 on January 18th at 2.30pm when we hear about Dunscore church's Zambian twinning.

Please do come and join us.

Liz Tanner

Postage Stamps

Just a reminder that we are still collecting used postage stamps, so please bring them to the church or contact me and I will collect them from your home.

Liz Tanner (tel: 261486)

Thanks for flowers

We are once again able to distribute the church flowers after the Sunday service. Thanks have been received from Helen Holland, Pat Sharp, Mrs L Gourlie, Mrs M McLaren, Mrs M Wallace, Margaret Thomson, Liz Tanner and Ian and Janette Kirkpatrick. Janette wrote "Yellow roses for Friendship! Many thanks for the hand tie delivered by Isobel. After a very difficult year, they were very much appreciated as was the blether with Isobel." Joe Robson also sent his thanks for the plant he received on the occasion of his 90th birthday.

Flower rota

December	12, 19 & 26	Christmas arrangements
January 2022	2	M Williamson
	9	C Smail
	16	R Chambers
	23	L Bell
	30	J Swan
February	6	Mr Rogers

Flower Team contacts: Maureen Wilson (255008), Moira Cannon (720394), Betty Jardine (257691) and Margaret Thomson (253484).

Gardening Club

The Gardening Club Christmas lunch takes place on Wednesday 8th December 2021 at Woodland House Hotel, Newbridge. We are meeting at 12 noon for 12.30pm. We will have a basket for donations to charity if anyone wishes to make a donation at the lunch. The local charities we are going to support this year are The Trussell Trust and The Usual Place.

The syllabus for the forthcoming session is as follows:

Date	Speaker		
January	12	Andre Barallon	Outing remembered
	26		Burns Celebration

Eunice Sutherland gave a report on the most recent gardening club meetings.

We are now looking forward to our annual Christmas lunch on 8th December at Woodlands. The Gardening Club has had a successful start to our long-awaited first session since lockdown.

The outing to Stockarton Gardens was reported in an earlier issue of the Chrystal Chronicle, as was the talk given by our much-appreciated Duncan Ford, the Hoddam Ranger.

On 6th October Willie Taylor added to our knowledge of snowdrops and honey. Astonishingly, there are 700 varieties of snowdrops. Look closer at the ones you have in your garden! Every member was also given a jar of his own delicious honey.

Our next speaker was one of our own members, Colin Anderson. Colin is an experienced and knowledgeable gardener. He spoke on the wildlife in his garden and its environs. A keenly observant person, he brought right to our doorsteps the sad diminishing of birds and insects.

On 3rd November, the Rev. Graham Finch's subject was Stained Glass. He talked, particularly, of the work of Alf Webster, a famed stained-glass maker, mainly of church windows. Graham brought out the meaning in these windows with great clarity and understanding.

The season finished on 17th November with Brian MacAvennie of the Council Parks Dept. Brian was bombarded with questions (which he loved!) and, at times, suggested that old methods were best. He was complimented on the arrangements throughout the town with the interesting change from bedding plants to perennials. A good description of the Gardening Club, and still flourishing!

From our friends in Debrecen

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.” (Psalms 130,6)

The selected verb warns you of the importance of standby. Being ready is like staying awake. The others are on guard duty, falling asleep today is irresponsible and risky. Congregations are such places of worship, where we have been waiting for His true return for two thousand years, from generation to generation. He expects us to be ready, not idly waiting for the trumpets but faithfully living for Him and spreading the good news of the gospel.

Wishing everyone a Merry and Blessed Christmas! May God Bless you and Keep you All.

With brotherly love,
all members, minister and session clerk of the Debrecen-Árpád
Square Reformed Church

Rev. János Veres
Minister

János Szilágyi
Session Clerk





Blythswood Care - Shoe Boxes 2021

The support from the church and community, with a sizeable input from Dalbeattie has been absolutely wonderful - 111 filled boxes. Additional items (varied) were donated, too. Cash donations of £266 (some of which were Gift Aided) were also sent.

The lorry collected the donations on Monday 1st November at Tesco overflow car park – by Gerry and Stewart.

Thanks to all who contributed in any way to make the above happen!



Reflection

We all love singing carols. Here are some to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

The first **N**owell

It came upon **A** midnight clear

We **T**hree kings

Once **I**n royal David's city

The **V**irgin Mary had a baby boy

Infant holy, **I**nfant lowly

While shepherds watched **T**heir flocks by night

O come, all **Y**e faithful

People look east, the time is near

O **L**ittle town of Bethlehem

Christians **A**wake, salute the happy morn

See in **Y**onder manger low

Lord God, we give you thanks for the birth of your son Jesus Christ in a lowly stable in Bethlehem. Let us, like the shepherds and the Magi, take time to worship Him. We remember particularly all those who, for whatever reason, find Christmas a difficult time. Grant them the strength to find peace and comfort at this time.

This we ask in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

Next magazine

The deadline for our February/March issue is **Sunday January 23** for items through the church – and 3pm that day for those sent direct. Many thanks as always.

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